

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-2. (canceled)

3. (currently amended) [[A]] The method according to Claim [[1]] 19, in which the franking mark further comprises a terminal identification code associated with [[a]] the one terminal ~~which provided the unique bit string to a user.~~

4. (currently amended) [[A]] The method according to claim [[1]] 19, in which the identification code comprises at least one of a user identification code ~~and/or~~ and a printing identification code, said printing identification code being associated with a printing device which printed the franking mark.

5. (currently amended) [[A]] The method according to claim [[1]] 19, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value, and the method also comprises the ~~following~~ steps[[:]] of [[e.]] subtracting the counter value from a remaining counter value stored with [[said]] the unique bit string in [[said]] the second memory [(40)] and checking whether the remaining counter value amounts to more than zero, and, if so, then establishing that the

franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.

6. (currently amended) [[A]] The method according to claim [[1]] 19, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value and the method also comprises the ~~following steps: f.~~ step of checking whether [[said]] the combination occurs in [[said]] the second memory [[(40)]], and, if so, then establishing that the franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.

7. (currently amended) [[A]] The method according to claim 5, in which also is checked whether a period of validity associated with the franking mark has expired.

8. (currently amended) [[A]] The method according to claim 5, in which, if it is established that the franking mark is valid, a routine is started for automatic post-payment of an account related to the franking mark.

9. (currently amended) [[A]] The method according to claim [[1]] 19, in which the franking mark is located on a postal article which, for the sake of delivery is sorted in at least a first and thereafter a second sorting ~~centre~~ center, and in which the reading and decoding steps ~~a and b~~ are executed in the first sorting ~~centre~~ center and the information obtained therefrom is sent to a checking ~~centre~~ center, after which the two checking

steps ~~e~~ and ~~d~~ are executed in the checking ~~centre~~ center prior to sorting in the second sorting ~~centre~~ center.

10-11. (canceled)

12. (currently amended) ~~[[A]]~~ The system according to Claim ~~[[10]]~~ 22, in which the franking mark further comprises a terminal identification code associated with ~~[[a]]~~ the one terminal ~~which provided the unique bit string to a user.~~

13. (currently amended) ~~[[A]]~~ The system according to claim ~~[[10]]~~ 22, in which the identification code comprises at least one of a user identification code ~~and/or~~ and a printing identification code, said printing identification code being associated with a printing device which printed the franking mark.

14. (currently amended) ~~[[A]]~~ The system according to claim ~~[[10]]~~ 22, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value, and the system also comprises means for ~~for~~ subtracting from the counter value a remaining counter value stored with said unique bit string in said second memory ~~[[40]]~~, and checking whether the remaining counter value amounts to more than zero, and, if so, then establishing that the franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.

15. (currently amended) ~~[[A]]~~ The system according to claim ~~[[10]]~~ 22, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value and the

system also comprises means for:~~f.~~ checking whether said combination occurs in said second memory ~~[[40]]~~, and, if so, then establishing that the franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.

16. (currently amended) ~~[[A]]~~ The system according to claim ~~[[10]]~~ 22, also ~~provided with~~ comprising means for checking whether a period of validity associated with the franking mark has expired.

17. (currently amended) ~~[[A]]~~ The system according to Claim 14, which, if it is established that the franking mark is valid, starts a routine for the automatic post-payment of an account associated with the franking mark.

18. (currently amended) ~~[[A]]~~ The system according to Claim ~~[[10]]~~ 22, in which the franking mark is located on a postal article which, for the sake of delivery is sorted in at least a first and thereafter a second sorting ~~centre~~ center, and in which the system in the first sorting ~~centre~~ center comprises said means arranged for ~~executing steps a and b~~ reading and said means for decoding and means for sending the information obtained ~~[[from]]~~ therefrom ~~said steps a and b~~ to a checking ~~centre~~ center, and ~~[[the]]~~ said checking ~~centre~~ center comprises both said means for ~~executing the steps c and d~~ checking prior to sorting in the second sorting ~~centre~~ center.

19. (new) A method of producing and checking franking marks, comprising the steps of:

storing a set of unique bit strings in a first memory in a central office that is connected to a plurality of terminals;

making one or more of the unique bit strings available to at least one terminal of the plurality of terminals;

at the central office, receiving from the one terminal a copy of the unique bit string made available thereto in combination with an identification code and storing in a second memory at the central office the copy of the unique bit string in combination with the identification code received from the one terminal;

reading of a franking mark after the franking mark has been printed on a document, the franking mark including an encoded identification code and an encoded unique bit string;

decoding the franking mark to render a decoded identification code and a decoded unique bit string;

checking whether the decoded identification code is correct by comparing the decoded identification code to the identification code stored in the second memory; and

checking whether the decoded unique bit string is valid by comparing the decoded unique bit string to the unique bit string stored in the second memory.

20. (new) The method of claim 19, wherein the unique bit string in combination with the identification code are

protected by a Message Authentication Code and the method includes the step of checking the Message Authentication Code.

21. (new) The method of claim 19, wherein the unique bit string in combination with the identification code are protected by encoding and the method includes the step of checking the encoding.

22. (new) A system for producing and checking franking marks, comprising:

means for storing a set of unique bit strings in a first memory in a central office that is connected to a plurality of terminals;

means for making one or more of the unique bit strings available to at least one terminal of the plurality of terminals;

at said central office, means for receiving from said one terminal a copy of the unique bit string made available thereto in combination with an identification code and storing in a second memory at said central office the copy of the unique bit string in combination with the identification code received from said one terminal;

means for reading of a franking mark after the franking mark has been printed on a document, the franking mark including an encoded identification code and an encoded unique bit string;

means for decoding the franking mark to render a decoded identification code and a decoded unique bit string;

means for checking whether the decoded identification code is correct by comparing the decoded identification code to the identification code stored in the second memory; and

means for checking whether the decoded unique bit string is valid by comparing the decoded unique bit string to the unique bit string stored in the second memory.

23. (new) The system of claim 22, wherein the unique bit string in combination with the identification code are protected by a Message Authentication Code and the system includes means for checking the Message Authentication Code.

24. (new) The system of claim 22, wherein the unique bit string in combination with the identification code are protected by encoding and the system includes means for checking the encoding.